

Quad City Times

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Vargas appointed to Great Places Board By Dan Gearino

DES MOINES — Gov. Tom Vilsack has appointed Scott County Recorder Rita Vargas to the newly created Iowa Great Places Board, a panel devoted to helping local cities nourish arts, culture and historic character.

Vilsack announced the Great Places initiative, which is overseen by the Department of Culture Affairs, in January. The panel's goal is to review applications for community and cultural projects, drawing on existing state and local money sources.

"Great places mean different things to different people. We all know great places in Iowa. We have a responsibility to preserve them, capitalize on them, learn from them, help them become even greater. That's what the Great Places initiative will do," Vilsack said.

Vargas said she is honored to serve on the panel and looks forward to working with fellow board members.

"I'm interested in some of the cultural projects that (the department) was talking about," she said. "Whenever I go up to Milwaukee, they have different ethnic festivals. My interpretation of what I was told (about the panel's role) could be something such as that."

Vargas said Iowa is a great place to live and raise a family. She is optimistic that communities such as Dubuque, Davenport or Burlington would want to have similar festivals. Her panel would be a great platform to ask for money to do that, she added.

"There are going to be three projects. I'm kind of anxious to see what projects are out there," Vargas said. "I'd love to be able to bring a project here to the Quad-Cities."

Anita Walker, the director of the Cultural Affairs Department, will hold forums over the next month across the state to raise awareness of the project, including one May 26 in Muscatine.

(Times reporter Wayne Ma contributed to this article.)

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